

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A knowledge switch comprising:
 - (a) a logic kernel for accessing information and distributing the information to users;
 - (b) a content database accessible by the logic kernel for storing information received from public and private computer networks;
 - (c) a profile module for storing user profiles including information for distributing the information stored in the content database to users;
 - (d) a plurality of input/output modules for contacting end users via defined user devices; and
 - (e) a plurality of templates for configuring logic kernel to distribute specific information to targeted groups of users.
2. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the logic kernel includes software that is configurable by end users or administrators using the templates.
3. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the profile module stores media portals defined by end users.
4. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the input/output modules include a web server for sending and receiving information via the Internet.
5. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the input/output modules include a wireless PDA server for sending information to and receiving information from a wireless PDA.

6. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the input/output modules include a phone alert server for automatically contacting a plurality of end users via a telephone network.

7. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the knowledge switch includes a fax, email, and SMS server for sending and receiving messages in fax, email, and SMS format.

8. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the templates include an event template including customizable fields for configuring the logic kernel to deliver alert messages to individuals in response to defined events.

10 9. The knowledge switch of claim 8 wherein the event template includes a customizable field for configuring the logic kernel to deliver different alert messages to different individuals.

10. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the templates include a contact list template including customizable fields for providing an individual's contact information to the logic kernel.

15 11. The knowledge switch of claim 10 wherein the templates include a schedule template for allowing individuals to associate the contact information with schedule information.

12. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the templates include an intra-agency knowledge switch management template for configuring the logic kernel to distribute alert messages to predetermined individuals within an organization.

20 13. The knowledge switch of claim 1 wherein the templates include an inter-agency knowledge switch management template for configuring the logic kernel to distribute alert messages to different groups of individuals.

25

14. A hierarchical system of knowledge switches for delivering alerts to end users, the system comprising:

5 (a) a plurality of first knowledge switches located at predetermined points of presence for receiving alerts and distributing the alerts over a computer network; and

10 (b) a plurality of second knowledge switches located at predetermined agencies, the second knowledge switches being coupled to the first knowledge switches via the computer network, each second knowledge switch being configured to receive alerts, apply a policy level to the alerts, and distribute alerts to end users associated with each second knowledge switch based on the policy level.

15. The system of claim 14 wherein the first and second knowledge switches include templates for defining alerts and individuals for receiving the alerts.

15 16. The system of claim 14 wherein the first and second knowledge switches are adapted to distribute the alerts based on end user and agency certificate levels.

17. A method for distributing and accessing information, the method comprising:

20 (a) presenting a user with a plurality of templates for configuring a knowledge switch to deliver alerts to intended recipients;

(b) receiving, via the templates, event definition information for defining events and associated alerts to be delivered to the intended recipients;

(c) receiving, via the templates, contact and schedule information for defining alert delivery modes and corresponding times for each of the intended recipients; and

(d) distributing the alerts to the intended recipients using the information provided via the templates.

5

18. The method of claim 17 wherein presenting the user with a plurality of templates includes presenting the user with a plurality of templates via a computer network interface.

10

19. The method of claim 17 wherein receiving event definition information includes receiving access information, user information, and triggered alert information via an event template.

15

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the access information includes spoken commands for communicating an event to a knowledge switch via a mobile or landline telephone, the user information includes a directive to be delivered to the intended recipients, and the triggered alerts information includes alert messages to be delivered to each of the intended recipients or groups of intended recipients.

21. The method of claim 19 wherein receiving contact and schedule information includes receiving contact information from intended recipients via a contact list template that includes fields for allowing each recipient to input contact information and receiving schedule information via a schedule template including a graphical schedule interface that allows each recipient to associate contact information with the schedule information.

20

22. The method of claim 17 wherein distributing the alerts to the intended recipients using the information provided by via templates includes, for each recipient, accessing contact and schedule information stored for each recipient, converting the alert to the appropriate format based on the contact and schedule information, and delivering the alert via a medium specified by the contact and schedule information.

5

23. The method of claim 17 wherein distributing the alerts to the intended recipients includes delivering the alerts via a telephone network to all recipients in a geographic area.

10 24. The method of claim 17 wherein distributing the alerts to the intended recipients includes parsing the alerts based on recipient certificate levels and selectively delivering portions of the alerts to the end users based on individual end user certificate levels.

15 25. The method of claim 17 comprising, determining whether receipt confirmation is required from each recipient, and, in response to determining that receipt confirmation is required, resending the alert if receipt confirmation is not received within a predetermined time period.

20 26. The method of claim 17 comprising, determining whether a response is required from each recipient, and, in response to determining that the response is required, resending the alert if the response is not received within a predetermined time period.

27. The method of claim 17 comprising including an authentication portion in the alert for allowing the intended recipients to authenticate the alerts.

28. The method of claim 17 comprising receiving input from the intended recipients for storing the alerts in a predetermined format, and, in response, storing the alerts for later access by the intended recipients.